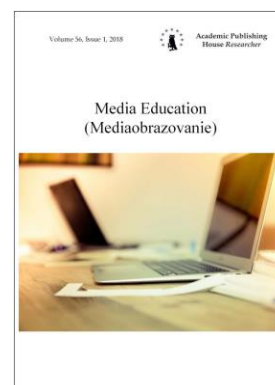




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Strategic and Symbolic Advertising of Coca Cola in Pakistan: A Perspective of the Cultivation Theory

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Abstract

G. Gerbner presented the theory of cultivation under the umbrella of his “cultural indicators” paradigm. G. Gerbner’s theory of Cultivation indicates that viewers who have immense exposure to media, particularly to television, grasp the social truths of the world the way they are broadcast on the screen and this activity influences the audiences’ attitudes and manners. Several scholars have exploited the cultivation theory to hypothesize about how media cultivates viewers’ perception of health risk, socio-political and cultural values. The bottom-line of cultivation theory is that the higher amount of time people exploit ‘living’ in the television realm, the greater is the risk of their assuming the scenes being portrayed on the silver screen as truths rather social realities. Coca Cola can be well termed as one such brand that is internationally recognized and runs a worldwide marketing campaign. The proof for its success is that the brand is well known not because of the taste but for its strong advertising as well. This phenomenal brand promotion has inspired the researchers to investigate the factors, policies and strategies behind strong impact of Coke’s advertising campaign through the Cultivation Theory. The brand has also made the researchers focus on what content exactly the coke ads contain and how it is presented on screen. For the study, Coke’s advertisement in Pakistan was selected. For this mixed method study, a semi structured interview was held with the company manager in order to explore the first objective. The content of the message was analyzed by applying qualitative analysis. The data were analyzed by centering on the first two prongs of cultivation theory. The study revealed that the musical theme underlying the sense of festivity, merriment and celebration that had been promoted to elate the emotions meet the demand of Pakistan’s collectivistic culture and hence, has become success factor of coke’s consumerism and raised the impact as well.

Keywords: cultivation theory, Coca-Cola, strategic, symbolic advertising, advertising campaign.

1. Introduction

This study aims at exploring the media campaign of Coca-Cola Company in Pakistan as a test case for the practical implications of the ‘Cultivation Theory’, which has been recognized as a sociocultural theory. The Cultivation theory was originally presented to enumerate the effects of television as the most influential medium of shaping its viewers’ ideas, opinions, behaviors and morals (Gerbner, Gross, 1976). The theory originated from a ‘cultural indicators project’ that

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focuses on a general idea about media's role, its impact and contribution in forming culture. The 'cultivation theory' addresses the role of advertisements as messages, the procedure and process of these messages' production along with role of media as an institution. These aspects make it a sociocultural theory. This research concerns more with these 'general indicators project' since we study cultivation theory to rationalize the power of impact created on general people through media campaigns. We replace the word 'media' with the television, because now the scopes are widened as compared to the times this theory was presented. The advertising world now uses media as a vehicle to create an imaginary world for its own benefit (Leo, Harijanti, 2018). This research paper aims to analyze the media campaigns that are not necessarily negative, as suggested by the 'Cultivation Theory', but might get positive outlook.

The research is two pronged: exploring cultivation theory with its scopes and limitations on one hand, and the philosophy of marketing strategies employed by the most successful and widely recognized brands on the other. The researcher has taken the Coca-Cola as an example, the brand has launched many successful advertising campaigns since 1900, when it was first launched. What this research has analyzed is the interesting fact that when one media campaign (in our case the coke campaign) exploits the themes that already permeate in a society and have a higher level of acceptability, it gets popular easily and becomes word of mouth. The researcher has analyzed the 'success factors' behind coke's campaigns by fitting in their 'strategy' to capture audience on the framework of 'the cultivation theory' which suggests that the entire value system of a society is formed mainly by television which becomes a vital agent in shaping up ideologies, assumptions, beliefs, images and perspectives of the viewers. TV depicts laden values, rules, and morals in a very subtle way, it shapes up people's perception about right and wrong, important and unimportant, and appropriate or inappropriate. However, while ransacking the theory the most significant turn is the 'Research Gap' as the research analysis is far beyond the scopes of 'the cultivation theory', moving towards the dimensions of enriched 'Discourse Philosophies' which present discourse as a social practice'. The research presents the 'discourse' exhibited in such media campaigns as the main success factor on the basis of its strongly rooted contents. Discourse is to be understood as a social process. This is not only a product of the society in which it nourishes, but it also plays a part in shaping the sensibilities, moods and behaviors of that society. Hence, this is spiral process where discourse is not only a product, but an agent in formulation of a community and its communication. The idea reiterates the fact that society and discourse are strongly interrelated, and the public contributes in shaping media content just as it contributes in shaping public's views. Media only reflects the social, personal, and cultural elements already present in the society. These elements are produced as a result of a vibrant process in which society and media equally contribute (Bhagwati, 2018). In the present case, coke's strategic framework plans every new media campaign with a single pivot of 'capturing audience' through stirring emotions, elevating spirits by presenting themes of joy, happiness, family ties, friendship and festivity. At this point it is important to notice that such themes already lie in a society; when Coke implies these themes, it knows that these are already popular themes all over the world, and become even richer in an eastern and traditional (conventional) society like Pakistan. The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do institutional strategies play role to make Coke's campaign more 'cultivating'?
- 2) What are the modes and themes working as the main factor for Coke's promotion and 'cultivating' its image?

2. Materials and methods

This research is a mixed methods study. The term "*mixed methods*" refers to an emergent *methodology* of research that develops the systematic amalgamation, or "*mixing*", of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation or sustained program of inquiry (Schumann, 2001). The strategy of mixed methods has been adopted to explore the themes of the Coke's advertisement in Pakistan by conducting the interview of the marketing manager of the company as well as to transcribe the advertisements for analysis. First of all, an exclusive interview was held with the manager to explore the strategies of communication in coke advertisements and it was further interpreted by using qualitative methods. For the second objective, the content of the advertisement was analyzed by applying the quantitative content analysis. Moreover, the data were collected from the ads of coke evolved over the years so that the content analysis can be carried out.

G. Gerbner draws three prongs of his theory i.e. institutional process analysis, message

system analysis and cultivation analysis to explore the process of media cultivation, Focusing on *the objectives of this study first two strands* were applied in order to carry out the research.

Institutional process analysis scholarship that works behind the scenes of media organizations in an effort to understand what plans or strategies might be functioning there. These activities helped to interpret the interview and expose the findings regarding the first objective.

Message system analysis Scholarship comprises vigilant, methodical study of TV content, usually utilizing content analysis as a research method. Frank (Fetisova, 2015) describes that content analysis is a systematic technique for analyzing what ‘words and themes’ are used and what characteristics fulfill various motives. It also helps in measuring the differences in values by comparing two or more items. In this study the ads on TV were transcribed for analyzing in the context of the cultivation theory and the increase or the decline of the sales in different eras helped in revealing the impact of the themes on the audience. The themes selected from the coke ads are musical, social, romantic, family, and non-verbal for this study. The interview helped in getting to know the ratio of selling the product. Hence, the content analysis helps in studying the second objective.

3. Discussion

Many studies have explored the ‘cultivation theory’ in respect to its operational function in recent marketing trends. There is no denying of the fact that advertisement influences a society. It is one of the chief instruments in presenting and endorsing a product. Advertisement predominantly changes the outlook of its targeted audience (Zaltman, 2003). The main objective of advertisement is to foster a distinct ‘image’ of some product, which is a ‘designed cultivation’. So, Zaltman believes that advertisement aims at formulating public opinion. If we examine Coca-Cola on these parameters, it undoubtedly has achieved these aims. J. Viceroy’s quantitative analysis proves the impact.

He studied the case of cinema audience who exhibited an obvious increase in buying of ‘coke and pop-corn’ after the idea was ‘cultivated’ into their minds through subtle ads. Vicary through a press release exposed the impact of concealed message during the movie, this semiotic message appears on screen for some seconds but had such a strong impact that the viewers showed visible increase in the trend of buying popcorn and coca cola (Akbari, 2015). Vicary gave example of that ‘drink Coke and eat Pop Corn’ message during a movie ‘Picnic’ which raised the sales of Coca-Cola up to 18.1 per cent and Pop-Corn to 57.8 per cent as per him. Some more researches also analyzed the impact of audio and visual messages in the contemporary advertisements. The phenomenon is real and audio and visual impact do form the sensibility of audience and change their response towards a specific product (Cook, 2016). No doubt the magnitude of impact may vary, but the effectiveness is unquestionable. There are two ways that create impact: visual through graphics and videos and auditory through background message in music or music itself. If we examine this theory by Urban, we can trace its validation in Coke’s advertisements which present both ‘visual and auditory’ impact; our study has specifically explored the musical themes and their impact.

These musical effects with special reference to Coke’s anthem have been analysed in the study *A Semiotic Analysis on The Perceived Meanings of Coca Cola “Anthem” Video Commercial* (Leo, Harijanti, 2018). The company effectively conduct such a strong marketing campaign that not only wins new consumers for them but also works on strategies to preserve the old ones. The company managed to retain its leading position for decades in the field of marketing and advertising; introducing fresh ideas of and on. From semiotic to musical, verbal to non-verbal, it has explored all ideas to exercise novelty and variety. The success factor owes much to experimentation and exploring of fresh ideas, yet all this effort is made to create a phenomenal impact.

The research has also analyzed ‘the psychological factors’ working in background for the appeal of Coke’s messages. A model based on four fundamental principles for community involvement are found in relevance to this study (Lakhni, 2008):

1. *Affiliation*: civic sense;
2. *Influence*: reciprocal power of group members;
3. *Amalgamation and essentials*: horizontal relationships, common values, expectations benefits/ resources/ emotional or financial support;
4. *Collective emotional link*: component of a community (bonding), common rites, festivities.

A successful advertising campaign to win public favor will include all the above elements as well. The analysis reveals presence of all these elements in Coke's advertisements.

The researchers presented the variables in the effectiveness of advertising by referring to (Fung, Carstensen, 2003); and (Drolet, 2005) who discussed the impacts of processing, digestion, or perception on the part of viewers. These studies focused merely on age and value system. There is variation and diversity in effect taking of the message recipients even, as result of diversity in identity. Age, cultural traditions, religious beliefs and social stature are the factors responsible for this diversity.

A study discussed the impacts of language used in most coke ads as the 'innovation' in use of language and how it works in capturing imagination of the viewers (Kodak, Oketch, 2015). They also referred to Roberts (1987) who suggests that the capitalism is among one of the influential factors. The consumers get strong impact of strong capitals, there is a tendency to rely more on the big names and well established brands. In the modern world such factors influence the choices of a common man. In recent times where the world has become a global village integrating societies and casting an equalizing effect over the whole world. In this modern world, technology has much to say and even much more to control as a result the impacts are more or less the same around the globe (Bhagwati, 2018). The regional aspects merge into international and integrate into one common and strong economic trend marked by its capitalist aspects and effects of technological aspects.

In his research, Shrum points out that the cultivation theory mainly examines the US culture and society (Shrum, 2017); however, there had been different studies of non-US world as well (Shanahan, Morgan, 2019). Gerbner and Gross state the cultivation theory as a socio cultural theory regarding the role of television in shaping viewers' perception, beliefs, attitudes and values.

Bridging Research Gap

While analyzing the advertising trends and impact of Coca Cola Company the researcher harnessed the 'cultivation theory' but explored it before applying. Although a major part of the theory relates to the research objectives but there are aspects which do not co relate especially the overall impressions; cultivation not necessarily is always negative, it can create positivity as in case of Coca Cola which focuses on elating the emotions. In his study 'Cultivation Theory' (Taylor, 1987) examines the weaknesses of the original theory presented by George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorelli. According to him, as it was originally conceived by Gerbner and his colleagues, the cultivation theory had many strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of this theory are prominent and distinguishable. The research was conducted in this case has been described as being groundbreaking (Shrum, 2017). E. Taylor (Taylor, 1987) referred to the work of Potter saying that there are a few problems that Cook (2016) introduces that have to do with the "conceptualization of cultivation indicators", the first being related to the television world answer. Although a theory like this was the first of its kind yet it missed out certain important variables, the most important of those include gender, age and already predominant moral values of the individuals affected. Our research also examines this phenomenon with special reference to Coke's advertising campaign by exploring its 'ideological and thematic basis'.

4. Results

An analysis of Coke's advertisements reveals a two-pronged line of action; the recurrent themes of happiness, and use of verbal and non-verbal modes of language and music to propagate them. In Pakistan they harnessed all such themes and modes in their advertisements which stir emotions and elevate spirits. The research discusses all such element while analyzing them. The two parts are indispensable and cannot be separated.

Themes

While observing the cultivation of 'Coke' reality in the brains of the receivers of the process of cultivation, it is also observed that the company cultivates the sense of community in the minds of the viewers. Ahmad et al., 2018 branded five characteristics of the element of the membership where 'Boundaries' is on top, which includes dress, social customs, and above all language or, putting it more appropriately, discourse since language is essentially a social activity. Coke ads in Pakistan are created focusing on all these aspects representing all classes of the consumers by highlighting the variety of dress, multiplicity of rituals, and the diversity of dialects. These aspects also serve the purpose of cultivating the image of the presence of the product in the lives of the

consumers in terms of emotional safety, and particularly, a sense of belonging and identification. Coke runs a comprehensive advertising campaign, cultivating its ads in vogue by working on small details and targeting the audience's psychology. The company realized the need to nurture a strong relationship with the people of a specific area by running the advertisement theme in accordance to their culture, traditions, common sensibilities, dreams and ambitions. For the company the trust and belief their customers show is the most valuable asset. It becomes the prime objective to retain this trust. That's why Coca-Cola consistently hold the message of happiness and joy in such an effective way that the customers start to equate these values with the brand name. The marketing team very successfully cultivate the idea into their consumers that Coke is an integral part of all festivity and is a symbol of style and fashion. In Pakistan these common themes were persistent like these were globally, here in addition to these, the most popular platform shaadi festivities (marriage ceremonies) is utilized to project happiness and larger than life celebrations, where people enjoy the peak of their feelings. Pakistanis render a great importance to shaadi festivities which is an undeniable part of their culture. Even a bird's eye view of Coke's ads is enough to establish the fact that they use themes of 'festivity, rejuvenation, family ties, culture and tradition'.

Modes (Verbal and non-verbal)

Coke marketers focus on cultivating happiness, not violence, and making their customers buy the drink; the target television audience of the brand enjoy drinking coke replacing the element of the cultivation of violence with associating Coke colors with happiness and celebration. To make the recurrent themes of rejuvenation and festivity popular, the Coca-Cola Company chose the most popular verbal and non-verbal modes of catchy phrases, already famous songs and jingles. They introduced different slogans throughout the years in Pakistan; such as: "Only Coca Cola makes everyone happy", "Open Happiness", "Eat drink live", "Let's eat together", "Drink in Excitement", "Fun of every Moment", "O' Cruel! Let me have a drink of Coca-Cola".

All these verbal modes had a potential to become 'the word of mouth' and remain popular until being replaced by a new 'catchy phrase'. To make these slogans popular many non-verbal modes such as famous tunes and jingles, presentation of some traditional music instruments; drums (dhol), folk dances, projection of a vibrant and happy environment, presentation of festivities like Eid, Wedding functions, family and public gatherings and collective feasts is used.

Coca-Cola Company has already used semiotic approach to strengthen its themes. The use of red color as primary element and white and black as other two dominating ones in the ads is part of this strategy. In contrast to the spilling blood shown on the screen according to the cultivation theory, pouring Coke onto the ice-cubes into the glasses with enthralling background sound of the carbonated drink.

The presentation of the bottle spinning in the hand of a youth seems to be very much inspired by the cultivation theory as the viewers are to grab it as soon as they enter a shop and find a Coke being displayed in a refrigerator or a freezer over there. The focus of the camera on the bottle and its gigantic presentation on the screen with enhanced display, which is, no doubt, beyond the reality, successfully cultivates the glorious image in the brains of the audience, making them feel delighted to imagine the product. Even the bottle of the soft drink is usually shown tilted to the consumers getting them to express unconscious readiness to drink it while having food or quenching their thirst. This well-planned activity is a very skillful and clever utilizing of the Cultivation theory for creating the 'reality' in the minds of the consumers only to meet the sales targets and achieve business goals. The use of peculiar, soft, dim light in the Coke studio is also a very smart move by the company as they are creating the image of their product in the brains of the audience: the image that stays in their minds even when they are listening to the famous songs without watching the performance of the artistes. Represented participants have been placed against a beautiful setting which has been

Coke's marketing strategies

The success of Coke's advertisement lies in its comprehensive understanding of the 'cultural values' of any society, no doubt there are many themes 'universal' in their scope. That's why these are used universally, there are however a few specific to a certain culture. The media experts of the company study well different potentials and dispositions before launching any new campaign. Hence every new media campaign is well planned and well thought of. The next phase is its implication and the strategies involved.

The policy statement from Coca-Cola Company makes it clear that they strive to establish an environment of positivity. They wish to exercise a strong impact for betterment of society by presenting the 'ideal' world in their advertisement. Their stance is "It's not enough to conduct business responsibly; we endeavor to go beyond this by improving the lives of those who are touched in some way by our business. Our efforts don't have an end date – corporate responsibility is an ongoing journey. It will continue to evolve as long as we exist." Coke which was initially a sort of remedy because of its ingredients such as cocaine become a symbol of style and fashion to such an extent that now it has become an integral part of the modern life style. From the humble beginning to its phenomenal success the story can be presented as an example of the perfect marketing strategy that never fail to capture audience.

The language used in advertising is the most critical part of it. The discourse presented in this advertisement is a key factor in making them popular and influential. The content lay foundation for all marketing and result in establishing a strong image. An advertisement is the representational voice of a brand; based on what message the company wishes to communicate to its consumers. The advertisements not only set aims and raises expectations of consumers, it also assures the buyer that his money is not wasted and his expectations are fulfilled. Coca Cola has recognized the importance of 'marketing content', use of language and way of communication. The commercial messages are marked by their 'irresistible and unavoidable content; catchy phrases, heart-touching themes and music with a strong impact. We have investigated the verbal component of some famous Coke advertisements by using the Transitivity system as suggested by M.A.K. Halliday (Halliday, 1994). His research displays how language is used to represent a certain aspect of the world (representational function) thereby instilling a particular story in the consumer's mind. Thus, transitivity processes helps in identifying the representation of subject, mood, actor /carrier /identified.

Coca-Cola influences the world to such a great extent that it forgets about health risks it poses. The health threat is not an unknown factor, yet the strength and impact of the advertising campaign has made it dimmed. The marketing world glorifies the drink to such an extent that it has become phenomenal. It has established itself as an augury of happiness, enjoyment and merriment. The soft drink has become a symbol of joy.

To achieve a better understanding of Coca-Cola's philosophy and their strategies behind their advertisements especially in Pakistan, the researcher conducted an interview of the marketing manager of Coke Pakistan Mr. Arsalan Abbas.

According to him there have been many experiments in coke advertising throughout the years. In Pakistani market last five years witnessed a change in science of advertising by its becoming more digitally strong, being more terse and nevertheless vibrating and robust.

The real success factor of an ad is its being 'shareable'; its potential of being a word of mouth; the type of content you can talk about, share with friends and family. In recent times the most shareable content has potential of becoming a 'trend' on social media. The most desirable quality of a good advertisement is its being "shareable"; and what makes it so is predominantly the catch phrases (usually from Famous Songs & Humorous punch lines). Jingles are also used to popularize an advertisement.

Coke in their most advertisement aims to produce 'a catch phrase', which is more popular and easier than a jingle even. A catch phrase is more successful while it steps deep in a cultural tradition. The main challenge is to create that 'catch phrase', and at times conscious efforts are made to popularize these catch phrases; not only by creating a dramatic situation in the ad but even to the extent of preparing memes of that and stream them through social media. For example, just recently the punch line "Don't be cruel and let me have a drink of coca cola" was purposely made popular; the word 'zalima' (O' you cruel) was used for memes and they were floated on social media even before the ad went on air. This can be quoted as an example of utilizing famous songs; a recurrent theme in Coke's advertisements. Another example can be given with the reference to an ad where a family has gathered on table for dinner but all are sitting silently and suddenly in background the song (an old traditional one) is played: "Let's talk/ speak out". Hence by using an already famous 'catch phrase' from a popular song, enriches the ad. Coke believes in strength of music and the popular songs from the past, especially in reference to Pakistani Culture. Time and again they have used many famous 'song phrases' with new tunes; either to stir emotions as 'stimulants', to create sense of festivity and merriment purely for the entertainment, like: "*O' you cruel; come close to me*", "*Coke and love: true love makes you dance*

like a dervish”, “*Don’t be cruel and let me have a drink of coca cola*”, “*Coca Cola is the real source of festivity and friendship*”, “*Coca Cola along with rainy season and music is the real source of festivity and friendship*”.

Or for the purpose-based themes conveying some message, celebrating national days and events, motivating masses with inspirational songs like: “Coke bottle change program: an example of Cause Marketing”, “A revolution will be observed by us”, “The Pak nation is united”, “Talk to me/ let’s talk”, “O’ My brother”.

Coca-Cola launched many successful campaigns; never ceased to inspire, setting up new trends and producing vibrant and robust beats which make everyone ‘go with the flow’.

The Impact of ‘Coke Studio’

The ‘Coke Studio’ has a strong role to play in this regard. Time and again it has made different themes and songs popular, creating a strong impact and becoming even a trend to the nooks and corners of the country, capturing attention of multitudes. The songs become a ‘tool’ for the advertisement campaign and Coca Cola company has realized the key role they can play in attracting attention to such an extent that making the ‘catch phrases’ a ‘trend’. Nadeem Zaman collaborated with a singer Rohail Hayatt to materialize the concept of Coke Studio in Pakistan and launched the show officially. It proved to be a great success in the country, mainly by preparing remixes of many old long forgotten songs. This program also issued special editions to mark occasions and hence rooted deep down the musical industry of Pakistan it seldom lost its grip on audience and maintained a very good popularity rate. From mystical to merry making, from serene to flamboyant, from patriotic to personal love; it has explored all themes and produced the most popular music of our times.

5. Conclusion

An analysis of Coke’s themes, modes and marketing strategies reveal the line of action taken by the company to make its ads popular on a huge scale. While exploring themes it becomes evident that the specified socio-cultural aspects of Pakistani society are predominantly addressed. The impact of advertisement campaign is so strong that it has made the use of a ‘soft drink’ an indispensable part of the culture. This proves the power of ‘cultivation’ as suggested by the original ‘cultivation theory’ with the most significant difference of the connotation; reinforcement of a positive energy not the violence. The whole advertisement campaign is pointed to one single objective of building the strongest positive brand image. The image is painted with the help of semiotics in a vibrant and rigorous way. From the cricket matches to wedding festivities, family gatherings and moments of togetherness these modes raise a diverse range of positive emotions; patriotism, courage, bravery, cooperation, love, care and friendship. The study shows that Gerbner’s “Cultivation Theory” is most relevant to the impacts of strong advertising campaigns even in the recent world. However, it has even broader spectrums than were presented initially. Now media has the power to ‘cultivate’ not necessarily the negative strands but much positive emotions as well. The strength of media campaigns lie in their deep understanding of social structures and institutions and hence production and propagation of the content which is acceptable and attractive. Coca-Cola achieved great success all over the world in general and in Pakistan in particular through its deeply rooted advertising contents and strategic development of media campaigns. G. Zaltman ([Zaltman, 2003](#)) presented advertisement as an agent of change which affect or alter the audience reality by building a new ‘image’. Coke’s advertising gets successful in building such a positive image that the drink is established as a part of culture, even when its ‘health risks’ are not unknown. Still the ‘cultivation power’ is so strong that the focus remains on ‘positive emotions and energy’ associated to it instead the consideration to health. This can well be termed as success of institutional strategies in propagating the brand image.

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